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SUBJECT: DAS KRAMER AND FINNISH DG ESKELINEN DISCUSS  
RUSSIAN AND UMB AFFAIRS

REF: STATE 181103

Classified By: POLCHIEF Gregory Thome for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (SBU) Summary: Deputy Assistant Secretary David Kramer on 15 November met with Finnish Director General Eskelinen and other foreign ministry staff to discuss U.S. consultations around the G-8 Political Directors' meeting in Moscow and Finnish preparations for the upcoming EU-Russia summit on 24 November. In addition, the group spoke informally about current developments in Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus and ideas for possible cooperation. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On 15 November, Charge hosted a dinner for DAS David Kramer and Finnish Director General Kristi Eskelinen. Also in attendance from the Finnish foreign ministry were Director for Russian Affairs Olli Perheentupa, Counsellor for Russian Affairs Paivi Laine, Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asian Affairs Antti Turunen, Counsellor for Eastern Europe and Central Asian Affairs Tuula Yrjola, and EMBOFFs. The discussion covered a wide range of regional and international issues.

RUSSIA  
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13. (C) Perheentupa and Laine openly discussed their concerns regarding the proposed EU-Russia PCA mandate, a key deliverable the Finns had hoped to present at the EU-Russia summit on 24 November. Laine stressed that Poland alone was blocking the proposed language. When questioned about media reports that France was sympathetic to the Polish position, Laine clarified that France had agreed with Poland on a certain technical aspect (Comment: No further information on what this technical aspect was. End Comment.) but that France had given its support to the document. When pressed further on whether other states might be quietly supportive of the Polish position, Perheentupa and Laine stated with confidence that the mandate had the support of the other 24 member states including the Baltics.

14. (C) On Russian energy policy in Central Asia, Turunen stated that he would not be surprised by a gas cut-off this winter to Georgia but was interested to see how Russia would handle supply downstream to Armenia, as Turkey was unlikely to reverse a pipeline to supply it. Turunen described it as Russia "shooting itself in the foot" with regard to Armenia.

UKRAINE, MOLDOVA, AND BELARUS  
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15. (C) DAS Kramer and Eskelinen agreed that Ukrainian President Yushchenko, whether for health or other reasons, has not been fully engaged as President of Ukraine, leaving a power void at the highest level of government. Prime Minister Yanukovich is stepping in to fill this void and is

eager to prove he isn't a Kremlin puppet. While the Finns were concerned about the pace of government reform and lack of transparency in the energy sector, they were cautiously optimistic about Yanukovich's abilities. Eskelinen also stated that the Ukrainian government has faced a great deal of Russian pressure since the customs union with Moldova came into force and that perhaps Kyiv has not received the Western recognition for resisting this pressure that it should have.

¶6. (C) Turunen and Yrjola stated that the recent Russian suspension of the only passenger train from Chisinau to Moscow (see reftel) was an attempt to force de facto recognition of Transnistria on Moldova. Both stated that they believed this frozen conflict could be resolved if Moscow chose to act constructively. However, Moscow seemed satisfied with the status quo and unlikely to help resolve the current impasse. DAS Kramer made a pitch for moving forward on creating an alternative, internationalized peacekeeping force (PKF) to replace the existing Russian PKF. The Finns were cautious, arguing the need to pursue a political solution in parallel.

¶7. (C) DAS Kramer solicited ideas from the Finns on how best to "stir up" Belarus again, as President Lukashenko appears to be settling into his new term in office and strengthening his hold on domestic politics. The Finns lamented the apparent splintering of the opposition and stated that noted academic Aleksandr Milinkevich, while popular and respected abroad, is not a viable option to lead a united opposition at this time. That said, Eskelinen also opined that the Kremlin lacked a post-Lukashenko candidate and that this was driving its current strategy of pressuring Lukashenko while not attempting to depose him. DAS Kramer noted that there is no love lost between the Kremlin and Minsk. He suggested that

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if Moscow continued to take a tough line, Europe and the U.S. might be faced with the dilemma of a Lukashenko turn to the West as a means of alleviating pressure from Moscow. Eskelinen and her colleagues allowed that this was possible but agreed that, rather than engaging Lukashenko, Finland (and possibly the EU as a whole) would prefer to deal with Prime Minister Sidorskiy. Kramer added that his inclination was not to afford Lukashenko an easy out of the squeeze from east and west unless he took concrete steps such as releasing political prisoners.

¶8. (C) Comment: On the immediate issues of the EU-Russia Summit, the Finns' frustration with Warsaw was evident. Eskelinen and her colleagues also expressed their sense that Germany is already "feeling the burden" of the next Presidency, probably exacerbated by Poland's opposition to the PCA mandate. They welcomed and clearly took on board several of DAS Kramer's ideas on Russia and Belarus. On Belarus in particular, Finland has begun engaging opposition figures and civil society -- including Prime Minister Vanhanen's recent hosting of Milinkevich and a generous bilateral grant to the International Humanitarian University for Belarusian exiles in Lithuania. We will continue to brainstorm with the Finns and look for areas for cooperation in advancing democracy in Belarus and the rest of the region.

¶9. (U) DAS Kramer has cleared this message.  
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